KEATS, NARRATIVE AND AUDIENCE

The Posthumous Life of Writing

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Introduction: figures of reading

What makes the poetry of John Keats so compelling, at once so disturbing and so seductive, are its uncertain but irreducible and scandalous instabilities. What may most fundamentally be identified as the 'character' of Keats's poetry involves the uncontainable intensities of an inundation of figures, such as oxymoron, enjambment, neologism, and an adjectival distortion and syntactical dislocation, by which 'thought' – the ideational or 'thetic' – is apparently subsumed within the suffocating sensuousness of 'language'. At the same time, such intensities themselves generate an unmatched intertextual complexity, conceptual scope and intellectual force: Keatsian 'solecism' is produced by the interlocking and conflicting energies which displace and redefine oppositions between beauty and truth, mortality and immortality, thought and feeling, dreaming and wakefulness, passivity and activity, life and death. These are some of the uncertain polarities which generate form out of the sparks which fly from an intense conjoining and unsettling of incommensurable differences. These are the constitutive energies of Keats's poetry, energies of solecism met by the uneasy responses which the poetry continues to elicit.[1]

The instabilities of Keats's poetry are nowhere more evident than in the way that stories are formed, constructed, shaped and directed towards readers and towards audiences. Narrative may be said to produce the fundamental uncertainty of Romantic poetry, the uncertainty of audience. In narrative is inscribed the inescapably public dimension of poetry, a dimension which produces an awakening from the Romantic Dream of poetry (the Dream of lyric poetry) isolated from – both antagonistic and determinedly insouciant towards – its audience. Without stories – but there are only and always stories – Romantic poetry would be able to dream of a text with no reader, a speech-act with no addressee. But stories are

inescapably oriented towards and written *for* readers: the irreducible ground of narrative *is* audience. This is why narrative can be defined in terms of 'communication', as 'someone telling someone else that something happened'.[2] The unavoidable production of audience by the very existence of narrative results in the Romantic solecism which is the Keatsian solecism before all others: the solecism of lyric poetry. The Romantic Dream of texts without readers (which is the Dream of texts without stories) is also the Romantic Dream of lyric poetry (the Dream of poetry without audience because it is without narrative).

In this study, I suggest that Keats's poetry engages, above all, with the figure of solecism. In this respect it is important to recognize ways in which solecism itself inhabits, infects and violates the opposition between the poet and the audience, the private and the public. Solecism is an impropriety of language, a violation of the rules of grammar or syntax, a breach of good manners or etiquette, a social blunder, an error, incongruity or inconsistency (*OED*): in each case there is a collision between incompatible codes, between the private or personal and the public or social.[3] Poetry, specifically the poetry of Keats, is grounded in solecism because of its distortions of and within language. For poetry, the decorum of grammar is violated, conventions are disrupted, language itself is 'tortured'[4]: words must be stretched, misplaced, collided incongruously with other words, dissected into etymology, fragmented into paronomasia, semantically voided, and then bombarded with meaning.

Keats would seem to be eminently suited to such transgressive dissolutions of the decorum of language. The story goes like this: 'cockney', widely but indiscriminately read and with a limited classical education, vulgar, jejune, visceral, Keats's torsions of language may be understood – in terms of class, cultural literacy or education – as an attack on the decorum of poetry.[5] Reading Keats we are faced, again and again, with the problem of reading solecism – generic, historical, aesthetic, social, mythological, lexical, syntactic, narratorial – almost as a structuring device in his poetry: the endless questing for romance in *Endymion*, the historical error over who discovered the Pacific Ocean in the Chapman's Homer sonnet, the impropriety of shrill political denunciation in 'Isabella', the explicit sexual consummation which disturbed his publishers in 'The Eve of St Agnes', the scandalous reappropriation and internalization of a classical myth in 'Ode to Psyche', the lexical breaking of 'happy' in

stanza three of 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', the syntactical incompletion of 'To Autumn', the self-parody of narrative form in the clichéd opening of 'Lamia', and more generally the 'humanizing' embarrassments discerned throughout his work by Christopher Ricks and the 'enlightening' vulgarity described by John Bayley. These are just some of the ways in which the poetry presents us with the problem of reading solecism. In each case, what is articulated is a fault-line, a 'faulture' (a Keatsian neologism/solecism from *The Fall of Hyperion*) between private and public. Solecism constitutes the necessary faulture of poetry, the inescapable friction of the 'personal' with the 'social'. Solecism, in other words, is reading.

In the present study it is the pervasive faulture of narrative poetry that we shall examine most intensively: narrative as faulture, as solecism, because of its fracturing of the privacy demanded by the Romantic lyric. As a number of critics have shown, narration begins in instability, in unresolved tensions, most generally in a gap or opening in the finished surface of causality, reason, understanding or desire.[6] Such instabilities may be understood to inhabit the space between text and audience: the instability produced by an unfinished plot is not just the product of an irreconcilable friction within a narrative, but is constituted by the uncertainty of the reader in the text. It is possible to describe such uncertainties in terms of what might be called, after Jonathan Culler, the 'double logic' of narrative. Culler uses the phrase to describe the way in which the relationship between 'story' ('a sequence of events') and 'discourse' (that which 'orders and presents events') is constituted by *aporia*. To put it simply, Culler suggests that narratology must confront the paradox that while in any account of a narrative it is possible to show that story determines discourse, *at the same time* it is also possible to show that discourse determines story.[7] I suggest that this recognition of, finally, the impossible (double) logic of narrative, should also be framed in terms of audience. It is in reading, or in what Paul de Man calls the 'impossibility' of reading, that the double logic of narrative operates.[8] Culler's double logic of story and discourse is, in fact, only one of the double logics of narrative. Others include the paradox of what Paul Ricoeur has described as the 'progressive contingency' and 'retroactive necessity' of narrative: if narrative is founded on the possibility of causal relations between events, this causality progresses from contingency to necessity within the temporal space of reading itself.[9] Another double logic is that of the friction, or what Jean

Ricardou has called the 'belligérance' of narration and description: in order to tell a story a narrative must include description which is, by definition, an interruption of narration.[10] And, related to this, we might also refer to the antagonism of an aesthetics of lyric timelessness towards narrative temporality, and the apparently paradoxical sense in which narrative constitutes what Barthes has called the 'espace dilatoire', or what, in speaking of the Romance mode, Patricia Parker has characterized as a digression towards the end.[11] In each case, the double logic of narrative is also a problem of reading: to the extent that the Romantics wrote narratives, they were dealing with what I shall term an 'anxiety of audience'.

One element of the Romantic anxiety of audience may be accounted for, then, by a recognition of the problematics of narrative 'logic' together with the apparently constitutive incompatibility of narrative with lyric and its necessary engagement with audience. However, a number of social, economic and technological developments may be understood to have produced a historically specific anxiety at the turn of the nineteenth century. The eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed a number of advances in print technology, an increase in the market for books, in literacy and in the spread of print media generally, together with a decline in patronage and a subsequent professionalization of the writer.[12] One major consequence of this change in the role of the writer was an increasing division between poets and their audiences. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, writers found themselves in the predicament of what Jean-François Lyotard calls 'modernity', a predicament in which the writer 'no longer knows for whom he writes'. Rather than 'networks of reception', the published book is controlled by 'economic networks': 'as to what may happen to the book, what its actual reception may be, no one really knows'.[13] In this respect, it comes as no surprise that one of Wordsworth's unanswered and finally unanswerable questions in the 1802 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* is 'To whom does [the Poet] address himself?' (*LB*, p. 255). The possibilities and dangers of this situation can be graphically illustrated by referring to a few sales' figures: while Byron's *The Corsair* is said to have sold 10,000 copies on the day of publication,[14] a letter written by Keats's publisher delightedly records having sold seven or eight copies of *Endymion* (*KC*, vol. I, pp. 52–3), and the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, despite its eventual relative success, was remaindered. In a letter, Shelley estimated the total readership for

Prometheus Unbound to be only five or six.[15] With the examples, not least, of Scott and Byron, the Romantics were aware of and eager to exploit the possibilities offered by a vertiginously expanding reading public. At the same time, however, in the face of their uncertainty of audience and of what was taken to be contemporary neglect, the reception of their poetry by *future* generations of readers, in posterity, became crucial to the Romantics.

The historical configuration of the Romantic audience, then, may be said to account for certain fundamental aspects of Romantic writing – most generally the conflict between the private and the public nature of poetry. Romantic texts might be understood to be largely generated from an anxiety of the private as public, or poetry published: in this sense, publication is itself a solecism, a showing forth of that which should remain hidden, secret, private.[16] Thus the very relationship between Keats and audience might be framed in terms of the notion of solecism, and one way of conceiving solecism is as a form of Freud's 'uncanny', the revelation of that which should remain hidden, such that the strangeness of the uncanny is constitutive of Keats's poetry.[17] This complex of ideas – audience-solecism-uncanny – might be further elaborated and related to censorship. In this respect, censorship should be understood as an attempt to police the scandal (ethical, legal or social) of that which is at once public (written, published) and 'private' (that which should remain unwritten and unpublished). In a recent essay entitled 'Keats Reading Women, Women Reading Keats', Margaret Homans has begun to position Keats in terms of gender and censorship. Homans argues persuasively that Keats's position with regard to his female readers involves a defensive reaction to their implicit power over his poetry: Keats 'needs women to want him and his books, yet he resents women's power in the literary marketplace as much as he resents their sexual power over him'.[18] In particular, Homans discusses Keats's revisions to 'The Eve of St Agnes' and his arguments with his publishers over these revisions. In a well-known drama of censorship recorded in a letter written by Richard Woodhouse, a literary adviser to Keats's publisher, Keats is said to have altered the ending of the poem in order to 'leave on the reader a sense of pettish disgust' and to 'play with his reader, & fling him off at last' (*KC*, vol. I, p. 91), and to have altered the climax to make its sexual suggestiveness more explicit. Woodhouse claims that these changes 'will render the poem unfit for ladies'. For Keats, however, this is

beside the point (or precisely the point) because 'he says he does not want ladies to read his poetry' (*KC*, vol. I, p. 92). Keats's publisher, John Taylor, responded angrily to the poet's rejection of a major section of the reading public, pointing out that if Keats had 'known truly what the Society and what the Suffrages of Women are worth, he would never have thought of depriving himself of them' (*KC*, vol. I, p. 96). Of this exchange, Homans comments that 'Keats has not so much made his poem uninteresting to women readers, as made it necessary as well as pleasurable for male readers to control its distribution'.[19] This is an intriguing idea, which I would like to develop by suggesting that just such a drama of censorship is exemplary for Keats's poetry. According to Homans, the pleasure of the Keatsian text involves the double pleasure of scandal and censorship: the male reader (or writer or editor) is empowered by the poem to experience both the (erotic) pleasure of reading the forbidden text and at the same time the (again, potentially erotic) pleasure of forbidding that pleasure to women. Homans rightly focuses on the implications of this for the construction of gender in Keats's letters and poems. More generally, however, the structure of the scandal implicit in the pleasure of censorship might be understood to be fundamental to Keats's poetry. That is, Keats's poetry – and not only at moments of embarrassment, scandal, 'vulgarity', or 'badness' – may be understood to be structured by an unstable oscillation between privacy and publicity, between scandal and censorship. Reading Keats is figured as the solecism of reading not only that which should but, in an important sense, that which *does*, remain hidden.

This may account to some extent for various conflicts in Keats's texts, conflicts ultimately resulting in a reception which both reads and resists their figures of reading. The focus at various points in this study on what I refer to as Keats's 'figures of reading', involves a recognition of the importance of representations of readers and reading within Keats's poems. I propose that representations of reading or readers in the poems themselves constitute, fundamentally, the site of reading. This is not to suggest, in any simple sense, that the poems are 'self-reflexive'. Rather, I would point to a more radical recognition of the importance and difficulty of reading representations of reading. Figures of reading are necessarily both responded to and resisted, both read and, as instruments *of* reading, elided.

A similar point was made some time ago by Paul de Man in his discussion of Proust in *Allegories of Reading*, when he suggests that 'the allegorical representation of Reading... [is] the irreducible component of any text'. De Man then discusses the impossibility of reading reading:

> All that will be represented in such an allegory will deflect from the act of reading and block access to its understanding. The allegory of reading narrates the impossibility of reading... Everything in [*A la recherche du temps perdu*] signifies something other than what it represents, be it love, consciousness, politics, art, sodomy, or gastronomy: it is always something else that is intended. It can be shown that the most adequate term to designate this 'something else' is Reading. But one must at the same time 'understand' that this word bars access, once and forever, to a meaning that yet can never cease to call out for its understanding.[20]

In one sense this can be understood to result in the fact that the reception accorded Keats's poetry overwhelmingly repeats the reading figured in the texts themselves without attempting to read those figures. In as much as the critical reception of Keats's poetry involves, for example, assertions of enthralment with respect to 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', or aesthetic questioning and desire in relation to 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', this reception repeats the figured reading of Keats's poems without attempting to read its own reading as a figure of repetition. In this sense, 'figures of reading' designates the site of what Jonathan Culler calls the 'transference' which splits the identity of the literary text. In a recent essay which considers the question of the formalistic privileging of moments of 'self-reference', Culler suggests that such moments 'may be the marks of a situation of transference. The critic who claims to stand outside the text and analyse it seems hopelessly entangled with it, caught up in a repetition that can be described as discovering structures in the text that (unbeknownst to him) repeat his own relation to the text, or as repeating in his interpretation a relation already figured in the text'.[21] As Timothy Clark comments in a consideration of Culler's essay, however, far from questioning the identity of the literary text – as Culler proposes – this mode of argument 'generalizes' reflexivity 'into a structure whereby the poem (in a parody of the Hegelian system) includes within itself its own readings'.[22] Rather than putting into question the limits of the literary text, Culler's notion of reflexivity simply expands them to include the text's reception. By redefining 'reflexivity' as 'figures of reading', I would like to suggest

that the determination of reading by reflexive or embedded representations of reading is accepted only on condition of what de Man would call the 'impossibility' of such reading. Most fundamentally, but also most tentatively, I shall suggest that the end-point of figures of reading in Keats, and in the Romantics more generally, is a reading after death – the 'posthumous life' of writing, but also the posthumous life of reading.

As I have indicated, the present study attempts to situate such problematics of reading within the terms of the more specifically historical question of the audience for Romantic poetry. I explore ways in which Keats's poetry is related to the complex conception of audience developed by various writers in the early nineteenth century – in particular, by Wordsworth – in order to account for the fractured, problematic relationship between their poetry and their audiences. Over the last few years, critics have shown considerable interest in Romantic responses to, and productions and representations of, its readers or audiences (all of which may be suggested by the phrase 'figures of reading').[23] These considerations may be divided into a number of sub-categories. In the first place, there has been work, influenced primarily by Wolfgang Iser, on the role of the reader, on strategies adopted by hypothetical or 'implied' readers with respect to poetic language: rather than engaging with a historical analysis of the social construction of reading, such discussions are presented as a kind of grammar of reading.[24] Secondly, there are studies of the rhetorical intentions of the poet, studies which recognize – despite Shelley's nightingale singing to please itself and John Stuart Mill's poetry overheard – ways in which the Romantics were profoundly and quite explicitly concerned to *affect* their audiences, consistently expressing a concern both with how readers read and with how poets can manipulate the response of readers (to ethical, social or aesthetic ends). In these studies critics have been more interested in the notion of the poet's engagement with his or her audience than with the responses of those audiences *per se*.[25] The third major mode of critical engagement with Romantic reading also involves the reader *in* the text: colluding in some ways with both of the first two categories, a number of critics have sought to examine ways in which embedded, framed, or inset readers function, and ways in which such readers might affect, presuppose or manipulate the responses of empirical readers.[26]

The present book owes much to these studies of Romantic readers

and reading. In as much as they elide a number of theoretical and epistemological problems which beset the criticism of Romantic poetry and poetics, however, critics have tended to delimit their project to the terms either of showing that a poet was concerned with audience, or showing how attention to the role of the reader helps to elucidate the poet's technical control over poetic form.[27] Frances Ferguson has stated that 'it seems ... impossible to talk about an audience for Wordsworth's poetry without talking about reading':[28] I would suggest that once we start to talk about the intricate and contingent strategies of reading, the monolithic, autonomous, and homogeneous concept of 'audience' is fractured and disrupted. At the same time it is precisely this 'audience' which impels Romantic texts and which therefore undermines any examination of the complexities of reading separated from a consideration of the rhetorical compulsions of texts.

In this study I attempt to elaborate the problematics of reading and audience in Keats's poetry through a reading of his canonical texts. I suggest that the relationship between readers and audiences is inherently unstable: reading, in both senses, is subject to the incommensurability of the private and the public, reading as figured and figures of reading, the impossible temporality of reading (involving a teleological projection forward and an anterior reversal or rereading from the end), the conflict between the empirical and the hypothetical or ideal, between the living and the dead. It is my contention that such conflicts are ultimately incorporated into the crucial Romantic notion of 'posterity', a notion which might be glossed as the Romantic invention of reception infinitely but undecidably deferred to the future. Although the desire to 'live on' or 'survive' in one's writing goes back at least to Horace's *aere perennis*, and is a particularly notable feature of the Renaissance – in, for example, Shakespeare's sonnets – the Romantic period makes of posterity *the* major trope of reading. This 'invention' involves a refiguration of posterity as the necessary ground of artistic production and has important consequences, not least for strategies of reading and authorial presence. Both writing and reading become problematic because both involve a kind of 'posthumous life'. Writing 'lives on' after the death of the author, in posterity, a posthumous supplement of a life. Reading is thus understood to be textually necessary but, founded on the death of the author, it can never be present to itself. Put simply, once posterity becomes necessary to

writing, the attempt by reading to return to the originary act of inscription is interrupted by the absolute barrier of death itself. The originary moment of inscription which reading desires – under the guise of, for example, the attempt to 'understand' authorial intention or meaning – is displaced to a time *after*, a time which, in 'Tintern Abbey', Wordsworth calls 'after years'.[29] And this time, this after time or posthumous life which 'survives' in writing, is itself inscribed in the originary moment of reading. Reading, then, can only ever be other to itself, constituting *itself* as a kind of remainder or supplement of writing, while Romantic writing calls for an impossible coincidence of reading with the event of inscription.[30] Romantic writing inscribes reading as both a remainder – that which occurs or survives in a time radically posterior to the event of writing – and itself originary. The repercussions of this description of writing and reading in Romantic poetry result in an undecidable play of difference – suggested by the reciprocal notions of the 'posthumous life of writing' and 'the death of the reader' – which the work of, for example, Jacques Derrida, both responds to and results in.[31]

The question of posterity in Romantic poetry, the attempt to remain in one's remains, is the subject of a study which I hope to publish in the future. Let it remain for now with one or two examples of configurations of posterity, of posthumous writing and of the radical absence of the addressee in canonical Romantic poems. Coleridge tends to figure his addressee as mentally absent: in the conversation poems, the addressee tends to be sleeping or in a 'pensive' trance, and the effect of the Mariner's tale in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is to 'stun' the Wedding Guest. In Shelley's *Adonais*, the poet-reader dies in response to Keats's poetry, his 'Ozymandias' ends with a scenic devastation, a disintegrated monumentalization, from which the reader is excluded, while 'A Defence of Poetry' presents reading as a form of haunting by the unreadable, the unspeakable and the immemorial. Shelley also seems fascinated by the possibility of writing *after* his own death: in a letter, for example, he refers to Moses writing 'the history of his own death',[32] and his second volume of poetry constituted just such a fiction in its title – *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson* – while the Advertisement to *Epipsychidion* declares that 'The Writer of the following Lines died at Florence'.[33] Similarly, the problem of remains, of how to remain in one's writing, is itself an object of explicit concern in Romantic poetry and poetics, a concern most

notably expressed in Wordsworth's question in *The Prelude*: 'Oh, why hath not the mind / Some element to stamp her image on / In nature somewhat nearer to her own? / Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad / Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail'.[34] Similarly, 'Tintern Abbey' may be read as an elaboration of the problem of how it is possible for the poet to remain in his remains – the mansion of Dorothy's mind, her memory – after his death. In his essays, Hazlitt repeatedly returns to the question of posterity and in such texts as 'On Posthumous Fame, – Whether Shakespeare was Influenced by a Love of it' (from *The Round Table*), 'On the Living Poets' (from *Lectures on the English Poets*), and 'On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth', he refers to the writer 'living on', 'outliving himself', and 'surviving himself'. Keats himself frequently refers to the importance of a future reception in his letters and poetry – in poems such as 'Oh Chatterton! how very sad thy fate', 'To my Brother George' (lines 67ff.), 'Sleep and Poetry' (lines 81–4, 358–9), 'Great spirits now on earth are sojourning', 'Bards of passion and of Mirth'; and in comments in letters such as the statement that 'I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death' (*Letters*, vol. I, p. 394), or more commonly his despair that 'If I should die... I have left no immortal work behind me' (*Letters*, vol. II, p. 263) and his wish that his tombstone should carry the words 'HERE LIES ONE WHOSE NAME WAS WRIT IN WATER' (*KC*, vol. II, p. 91).

One way in which posterity is figured in Romantic poetry, then, is in terms of the posthumous life of writing. The most economical and powerful formulation of such a 'death' may be read in Keats's enigmatic fragment-poem 'This living hand':

> This living hand, now warm and capable
> Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
> And in the icy silence of the tomb,
> So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
> That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood
> So in my veins red life might stream again,
> And thou be conscience-calm'd – see here it is
> I hold it towards you –[35]

The poem is an exemplary expression of the posthumous life of writing. But it also suggests some of the paradoxes of such a 'life'. In particular, it announces the death of the reader. Distracted by the word 'wish' in line five and by the conditional tense in line two, most critics have read the poem as suggesting that readers might *desire* to

die so that the poet can live. In fact, however, if we take the words 'literally' we find that the life of the poet's hand *entails* the death of the audience: in order for the hand to live, the reader must transfuse his or her blood into it. Furthermore, the deictic assertions of presence – 'This living hand' and 'see here it is / I hold it towards you' – suggest that the hand does indeed live, which, according to the logic presupposed by the poem, means that the reader must have died. To the extent that the poem's empirical audience would want to refute the assertion of their own death, however, the poem would have to be read 'metaphorically' or 'figuratively': the text is 'only' a poem, and the words 'only' figurative. By this strategy of reading the audience refutes the logic of reading established by the poem, and to this extent excludes itself as an audience for the poem. In excluding itself from the poem's logic, however, the audience has not escaped the power of the poem's earnest grasp because, in refusing the logic of reading promulgated by the poem, the audience has become a non-audience – for this poem at least, the audience has died. In order to escape this mortal double-bind, the audience might attempt to traverse a reading somewhere between the 'literal' and the 'figurative' readings sketched above. But such a reading would seem to be kept in perpetual limbo, constituted by an icy indeterminacy of how to read – a reading which, like the construction of the Romantic audience as 'posterity', is structured around indefinite deferral. Finally, the 'reader' might point to the conditional tense of line two and assert that (at the moment of inscription, at least) the hand and the poet do indeed live. To do so, however, would only be to repeat, against the 'evidence' of our 'senses', the gesture which the poem prefigures, and to assure the poetic hand of its posthumous life. The poem suggests, then, that inhabiting the Romantic theorization of audience is a logic of reading which involves an indefinite deferral to a time after the reader's death. While Shelley's *Adonais* mythologizes the poet as destroyed by his readers (the reviewers), Keats's poem has already reversed this mortal thrall. As such, Keats's 'This living hand' is an exemplary Romantic poem because of its explicit engagement with, and implicitly, its presupposition of, the death of its reader.

A 'rational' explanation for what I term the 'death' of the reader might involve the following argument: in recognition of the fundamental absence of the addressee, the Romantics reinvented response as deferred to a time after the poet's death. In this sense,

response becomes a form of remaining, and the fundamental impulse for writing becomes the desire to remain. Once one becomes dependent for one's remains on others, however, then the death of the other takes on a crucial significance and there is a slippage from a concern about one's own death and remains to a concern with the death of one's readers, in whom one can, potentially, 'live on'. (This pathos of remaining is most clearly and explicitly described at the end of William Hazlitt's essay 'On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth'.[36]) In this sense, Keats's poem may be read as an attempt to short-circuit or prefigure this disastrous but inescapable logic of remains, and the inevitable event of the death of the reader.

Brooke Hopkins is right, in a recent essay on 'This living hand', to discuss the poem in terms of the uncanny because in doing so he reveals an important element of Keatsian solecism:[37] poetry in Keats involves, as I have suggested, a showing forth of that which should remain hidden, secret, private, unpublished. It is not necessary to consider one possible intended destination of 'This living hand' – Fanny Brawne – and its supposed origin as a love-poem; nor is it necessary to consider that the poem remained hidden, unpublished, until 1898; nor, indeed, is it necessary to remind ourselves that it is only in the last decade that the poem has been read with the scrupulous intensity for which it calls:[38] the solecism of the uncanny inhabits the poem's engagement with the reader's death. And it is this figuration of reading which Hopkins arrives at as the poem's 'most uncanny feature': 'the reader is placed in the position of sacrificing his own life in order that the hand in front of him ... might become "warm and capable / Of earnest grasping".[39] But this reading is hedged by the concluding sentences of Hopkins's essay:

> It appears to threaten the life of the reader as well, making him wish his 'own heart dry of blood' so that the same blood can flow in the veins of another. It is as if the poem *itself* has become the poet's body, something that can be reanimated only through a transfusion of life from the reader, the reanimation of the words on the page. Once alive in the *act* of writing, those words are now dead and can only be brought back to life by the reader in the *act* of reading. But that only serves to recall the reader to a consciousness of his own dying. And it is from that recollection, a version of Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*, that the uncanniness of Keats's poem ultimately springs.[40]

'It appears ... making him wish ... It is as if ... But that only serves to recall ... from that recollection ... ' One hundred and seventy years after a living hand pulsing with warm blood flowing through a